RECREATION AND AMUSEMENTS

Closely associated with social intercourse and, indeed, often as phases of it, have been recreations and amusements. They have, moreover, profoundly affected the characteristics of the nation—or, perhaps, they have been expressions of these characteristics or have been both cause and effect.

One of the features of the life of the China of the nineteenth century which impressed the Westerner was the slight emphasis upon athletics. Archery held a recognized place, especially in the preparation and drill of the soldier, hunting had its devotees, there were professional acrobats, and shadow boxing was much enjoyed. Many boys displayed skill in keeping a shuttlecock in the air with their feet, and engaged in swimming, wrestling, boxing, flying kites, and fishing. However, archery was regarded as primarily an occupation of the warrior. Hunting as a vigorous sport was largely confined to the Manchus—a heritage from energetic days before their conquest of China—and died out among them as the influence of sedentary life and of Chinese environment progressively became more potent. For the great majority of the Chinese physical exertion was associated with labor and escape from it deemed desirable. Games involving vigorous physical effort were not widely approved. Sports which in the Occident have been thought of as befitting the aristocracy—such as hunting, football, cricket, and tennis—would have been frowned upon in China in recent centuries. This was not always true. In more than one dynasty hunting constituted a favorite diversion of the court and aristocracy. Polo, of foreign origin, in T'ang times was followed ardently in imperial circles by both men and women. However,

by the latter part of the nineteenth century interest in such strenuous diversion had largely died out even among the once hardy Manchus. For the decay of such exercises the Manchu rulers seem, at least in part, responsible. They discouraged Chinese from pursuing manly sports for fear that thus preparation might be made for throwing off the Ch'ing yoke. While, in spite of supposed taboos on such activities, some survived, they did not enjoy the prominence in China that they have in Anglo-Saxon lands.

The rapid growth in popularity of athletics in the past two or